

11-30-2009

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Recommended Citation

University Relations, "Computer science students benefit from National Science Foundation grant" (2009). *University Relations News Archive*. Paper 1388.

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Computer science students benefit from National Science Foundation grant

Summary: The Morris computer science discipline was chosen as a partner in the Upper Midwest Information Assurance Faculty Development Project that seeks to advance knowledge in the fields of information assurance and computer security.

(November 30, 2009)-The Morris computer science discipline was chosen as a partner in the Upper Midwest Information Assurance Faculty Development Project. Funded by a \$349,759 National Science Foundation grant, the project's goal is to advance knowledge in the fields of information assurance and computer security, support current faculty, enlarge the pool of qualified faculty, and to increase the number of graduates prepared to enter employment in this high demand area.

The project is headquartered at Dakota State University (DSU) in Madison, South Dakota, a national Center of Excellence in Information Assurance education as designated by the National Security Agency and Homeland Security. The new partnership allows DSU to serve as a resource for colleges and universities that qualified for the project.

"This is a very useful partnership for the University of Minnesota, Morris," states Nic McPhee, professor of computer science. "We attended an impressive initial workshop held in June 2009, and were exposed to a ton of very valuable ideas. After the workshop, we applied to be a continuing partner through the grant, and we were accepted."

The United States government defines information assurance (IA) as "measures that protect and defend information systems by ensuring their availability, integrity, authentication, confidentiality, and nonrepudiation."

"The students are very interested in information assurance," shares McPhee, "and there's a high demand on the industry side. The DSU partnership will help us serve our students better."

McPhee and fellow computer science colleagues, Kristen Lamberty, assistant professor, and Elena Machkasova, associate professor, have already incorporated new IA concepts into coursework and student research. Machkasova is working with Nathan Dahlberg '09, Valley City, North Dakota, and Nolan Nordlund '10, Clearbrook, on a directed study.

"Nolan and I are working with Professor Machkasova to review the security content of the Introduction to Web Development course," shares Dahlberg. "Software security is a constantly changing field, and we are researching different tools to aid students in the class to maintain best practices in regards to this. The goal is to ensure that relevant and thorough security is being taught and used by the Computer Science discipline. In particular, we are looking at installation, configuration, and proper use of Apache server software, php server-side scripting, and SSL encryption."

Long-term plans for the Morris Computer Science Discipline include adding new material on network security and computer forensics to the current curriculum, either by expanding existing courses or creating new electives. "DSU has good solid courses in these areas and will be an excellent resource," states McPhee.

Morris and its partners through the NSF grant will collaborate on research and share results with the goal of publication to further disseminate knowledge in the IA field.

Photo: Nathan Dahlberg '09, Valley City, North Dakota, and Nolan Nordlund '10, Clearbrook

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